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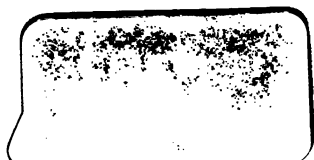
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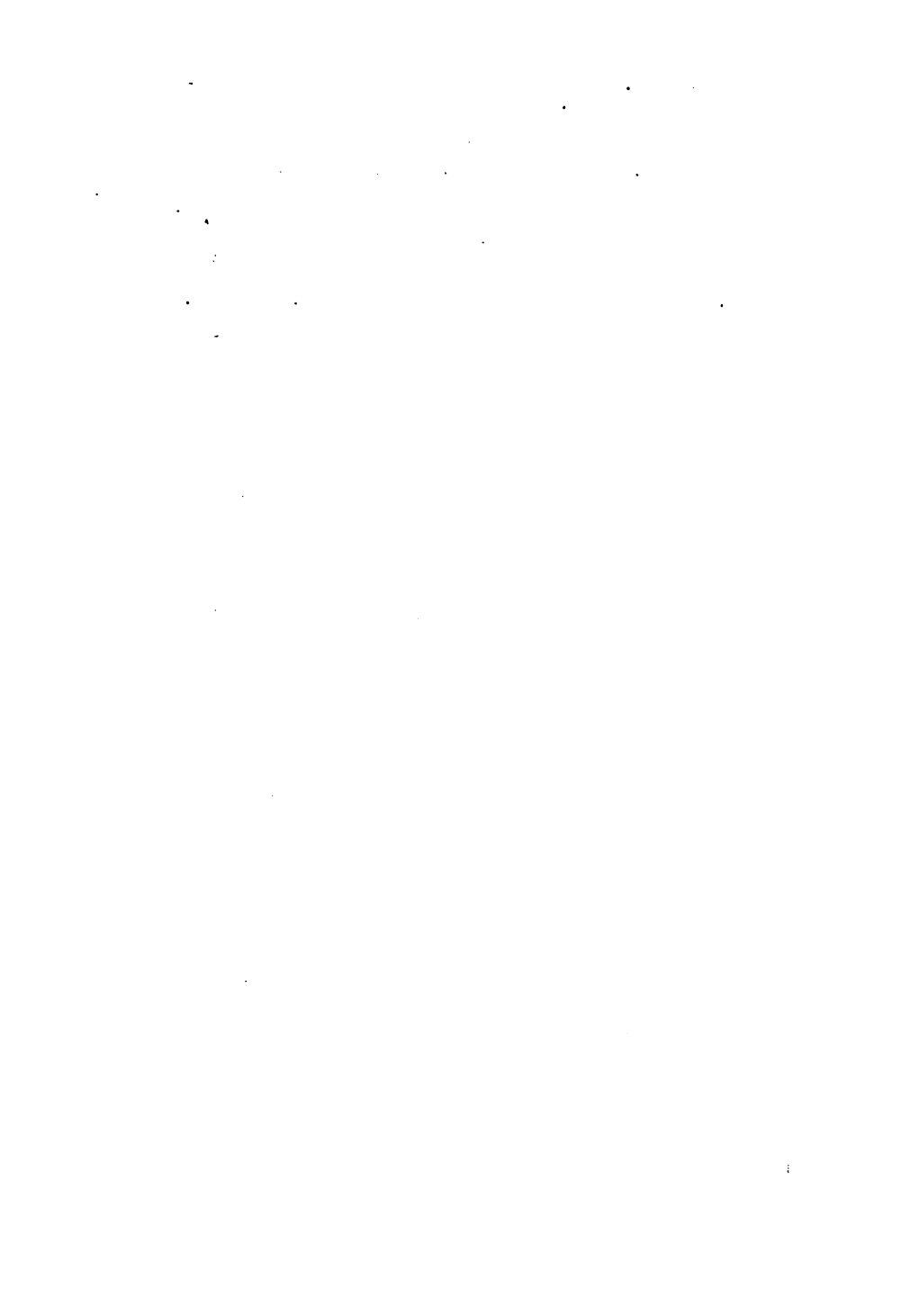
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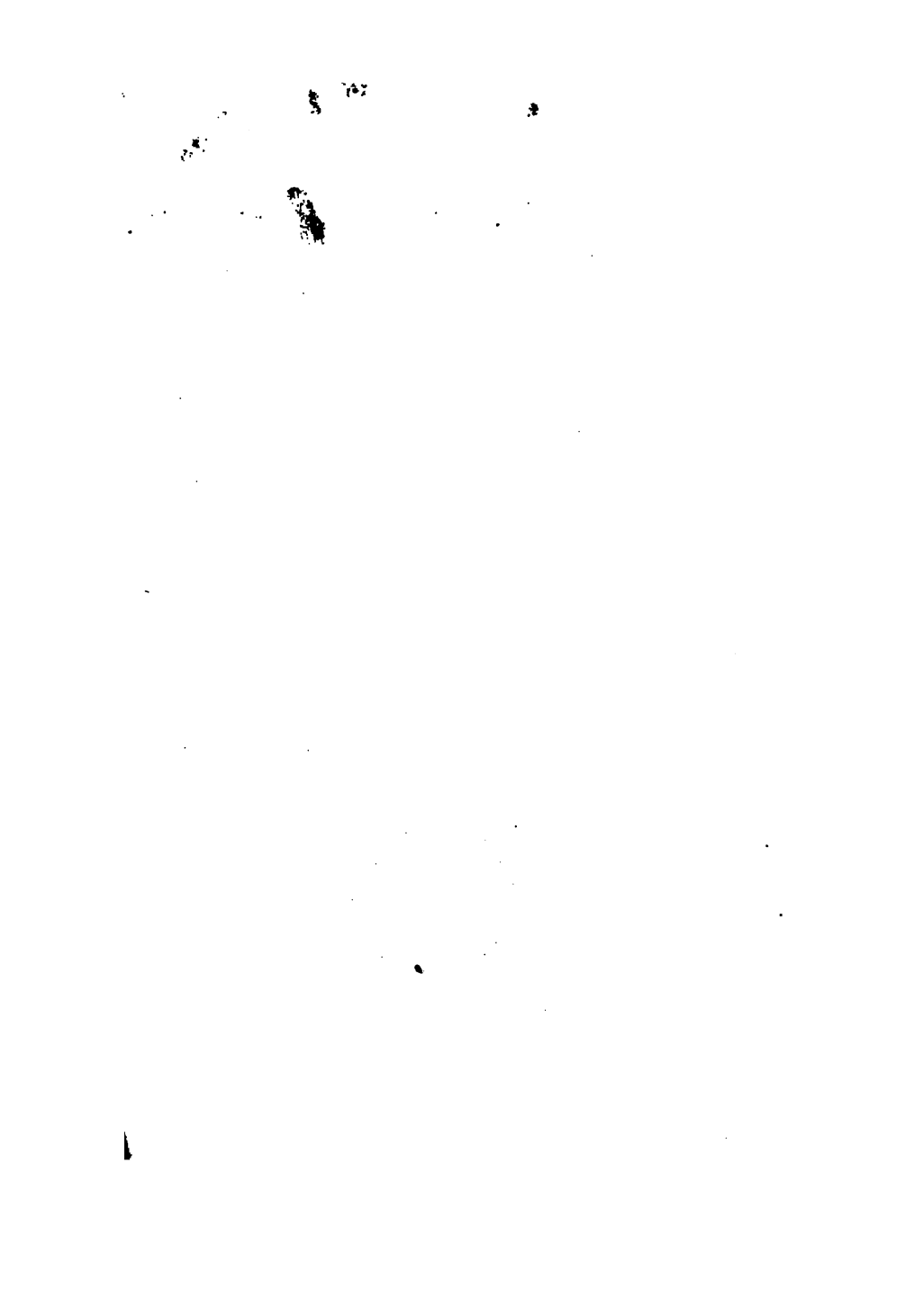
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ONLY EFFECTUAL PROTEST AGAINST ROMANIZING ERROR

AND SECTARIAN EXCLUSIVENESS:

With an Apology for the Isolated.

'Do this till I come!'—THE LORD JESUS.



LONDON:
ELLIOT STOCK, PATERNOSTER ROW.

1874.



GENERAL INTRODUCTION.

SOME years ago, in a small publication now almost forgotten, the writer of the following pages had occasion to observe that churches, properly so called, ought to be neither more nor less than extended Christian households ; places of instruction for the inexperienced, and harbours of refuge for feeble and storm-tossed voyagers seeking the better land. For if, it was said, they tend not to the ennobling of the Christian character ; if they can offer no effectual check to worldliness ; if they can present no counteracting force to the lowering influences that are ever at work in ordinary society ; if they can form and sustain no public opinion of their own, higher and purer than that which may conventionally prevail at any given time in Christianized society, it becomes hard to say of what practical use they can be to anybody.

On the other hand, if they are really defences from evil for the young and inexperienced ; if they are truly conservators of that hidden and higher life which influences from without are so likely to impair ; if they directly promote a devout and painstaking study of Scripture ; if they obviously elevate those who come into their fellowship,—*so obviously* that all who have to deal with them perceive at once that such persons are more trustworthy, more gentle, more humble, more self-denying, and more disinterested than men generally are, 1

if, though it only be in degree, they are found really to check prevailing ambition and greed of gain ; if worldly distinctions and social exclusions exercise less power over church members than over others ; if plain, positive, tangible distinctions can be perceived by ordinary observers between *their* spirit, conduct, and character, and the temper and conversation of worldly people, — *then* instead of being unrealities, are Christian fellowships the most living, powerful, and heavenly institutions that are to be found in this fallen world.

Since these sentiments were expressed seven eventful years have passed over us, and during that time little evidence has been afforded that the institutions in question have done much, if anything, towards moulding men after the divine pattern, or making those who have joined them wiser, better, or more spiritual.

During these years Christianity in England has been gradually losing its moral power. Scepticism has both deepened and extended. A rapidly increasing number of young men have, one by one, silently separated themselves from all Christian worship and communion, while one of the most important sections of the community—the skilled artisans—have, almost to a man, been confirmed in their alienation from all forms of religion. To such an extent is this now the case that, in shops of workmen consisting of three to four hundred men, it is difficult to find more than three or four who ever enter any place of public worship. Some are avowed atheists. More are purely material, hard work and mere animal enjoyment alternating in their lives. All, with very few exceptions indeed, are at present not simply indifferent, but *averse* to the religious institutions which were familiar to their

childhood,—for most of them have been brought up in Sunday schools.

Those who have made it their business to mingle more or less with the working classes, and who have gained their confidence, find that, as a rule, *three reasons* are given by the men themselves as, partly at least, accounting for this state of things.

The *first* is the supposed defective character of many who occupy prominent positions in particular sections of the religious world, as leaders, deacons, or wealthy members in places of worship. It is a *common belief* among the artisans, whether sustained or not by facts, that such persons are, as a rule, harder in driving bargains, less generous in their transactions with those they employ,—in short, *more* selfish and less charitable in their judgments than others.

The *second* reason is supposed to be found in the greater respect always paid by religious bodies to the richer members of their respective communities. That all men are equal before God may be universally admitted, but the doctrine is not acted upon. A poor man, in a modern church, is not unwelcome when regarded as one willing to be taught and guided by his betters, since he is in that case a living evidence of good supposed to be accomplished. But this is a very different thing from welcoming him as a guest. The man himself does not wish to be other than he is. He *prefers* to sit apart and associate with his own class. What he wants is to be regarded as a brother, not merely when he joins the society, begins to pay pew-rent, or is called upon to subscribe his pence to a missionary society, but from the first moment that he enters a religious assembly, weary, 4

bewildered, or sceptical. Not such, however, is his reception.

The *third* is a persuasion that premiums are held out for religious profession by the bestowal of pecuniary or other benefits on those who unite themselves to particular places of worship. Professors of religion—often, it is said, mere hypocritical followers either of the Church of England or one of the sects—are always *preferred* by the richer members to men who, however faithful, do not belong to them. This, say they, renders it difficult for a working man to become religious, in the ordinary acceptance of the word, without exposing himself to the suspicion of acting from mean and interested motives.

The truth is—and why should it be disguised?—modern churches always represent *classes*, and cannot do otherwise. *Formerly* the Church of England was distinctively the church of the aristocracy, and *being such*, it had a kindlier feeling towards the poor than exists at present, for the peasant and the peer are capable of being brought much nearer to one another than are any intermediate orders in society. *Now*—in this age of great cities and of trade—not the Episcopal Church only, but emphatically the churches of the Nonconformists, are essentially middle-class institutions, and it is on this account, more than on any other, that they are shunned by the working man. Everything that is congregational belongs to the middle class. All arrangements are adapted to them. The wealthy among them are the chief subscribers whenever money is needed, and therefore necessarily rule. As deacons, as main supporters of the ministry, of the schools, and of the various churches or societies affiliated to the sect, they count the

church or chapel, as it may be, *their own*, and they insensibly introduce into its management all the faults of the order to which they belong.

Among such *the class spirit* is strong,—the commercial spirit perhaps stronger. Money is naturally regarded by them as all-important, and its possessors are deemed to be chief among the brethren. These men render important services to the religious bodies with which they are connected. The good they do, when disinterested, springs out of the Christianity they profess. Their faults and weaknesses—love of power and patronage, and a certain vulgar pride more or less disguised—mark them as *common-minded*, and occasion them to be disliked by persons in the rank of the skilled artisan.

These things cannot be changed so long as the advancement of religion is inseparably associated with gifts of money and with expensive places of worship. The respectable working man feels that under such circumstances he is placed at a great disadvantage; he shrinks from endeavouring to occupy any office which he is conscious can be more acceptably filled by a wealthier man; and he shrinks still more from the position of one who may perhaps be suspected of a desire to benefit by the liberality of others. The result of the whole is, he stands altogether aloof from religious association.

The men tell us frankly they do not see Christ in the Christianity by which they are surrounded. What they want is a somewhat different development of Christianity from that which is usually taught. A new version of it; not *new*, but strange to this generation; a version of it which prevailed in the Roman world for about half a

century after the death of Christ, but has scarcely ever been generally proclaimed since; *lost*, in the first instance, through the inroads of ecclesiastical despotism, and in later days by the prevalence of stereotyped creeds, and the multiplied conventionalisms of an artificial civilization. They want a fresh presentation.

We have had enough, say they, of ecclesiastical religion; we want something that is independent of priests and churches. Would to God that this were possible! that the beautiful picture drawn by Robert Burns in his 'Cotter's Saturday Night' could be realized in England! that our strong-handed and well-skilled artisan could be found seated at the proper time at his own table as a priest in his own house, where, gathering his family around him, he should perform the sacred rites in person. What can be conceived of more likely to give dignity to his position, or to secure attention to the duties it would involve, such as good example, prudence, temperance, and such forms of self-denial as are essential to happiness? Can it be doubted that just so far as household piety of this character took root it would elevate the homes of the working classes, and bind husbands and wives, parents and children, in new bonds of peace and affection.

In the practice of a home religion of this character, if patience and forbearance were cultivated, many, now sceptical, would soon come to perceive that while all men have not the same light, the same order of intellect, or the same way of viewing things, truth is best proved by the evidence it brings with it to each person that it is *truth for him*; by its accordance with that sense of right in obedience to which things 'fulfil the real law of their

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being ;' by its obvious tendency to promote goodness and happiness. For as a child born into the world brings love with it, and creates a kindred love in parental hearts, so a true and divine thought comes home to the man who is prepared for its reception, with an evidence not unlike that which he has that the sun shines in heaven. He feels its warmth, he receives its life-giving influences, he rejoices in its beams. Read thus, the Bible would become another book to the working man. Questions about inspiration and miracles, and discrepancies of statement, and diverse views regarding orthodox or unorthodox theology, would soon settle themselves if they were habitually subordinated to righteousness ; while all that is divisive, professional, and not disinterested, would ere long be merged in one consideration,—‘ How can we best promote love to God and love to man ?’

It is easy to say, ‘What hinders so blessed a consummation ? Where is there a church that would not unfeignedly rejoice to see all its members thus realizing their privileges *at home ?*’ The reply is,—true, but *only under conditions* ; the first and chief being, that the household must be subordinated to the Church ; that piety at home must be *the result* of influences radiating from the public assembly ; that it must not be separated from what is supposed to be a higher organization ; that it must on no account be regarded as *complete in itself*. But this involves everything at issue. We may grieve over the matter if we will, but it is unquestionable, whether we like it or not, that if religion cannot be separated from church or chapel going, from pew-rents, from incessant collections of money, from ecclesiastical

supervision, from middle-class domination, from patronage, and from the 'pride of life,' the artisan, right or wrong, will have none of it.

Yet how, it will be rejoined, can religion be other than it is? Has not God appointed churches, and ministers, and a godly discipline? Has He not connected therewith ordinances which can be rightfully dispensed only by ordained men, whether we entitle them bishops or elders, presbyters or clergy? Is there not on this point an all but unanimous conviction on the part of Christians, whatever may be their ecclesiastical differences, that the Lord's Supper at least is a sacred deposit, of which churches are the appointed guardians? Is it to be disputed that the smallest of all fellowships, even such as deny priesthood in every form, carefully debar from the table of the Lord *whom they will*, if in the judgment of the brethren a contrary course would seem to them to involve participation in doctrinal error, or, in short, in any form of wrong doing or thinking? How then is it possible to yield to a claim so wild as that which demands that *everything* relating to the spiritual life should be relegated to the head of a family?

The essay on 'Household Communion' is a reply to this reasoning; written not with special reference to the artisan or any other class, however numerous or important, but for the consideration of all Christians. It is a protest at once against superstition and sectarianism, and its application is as wide as the evils it condemns. But it certainly bears very directly on the great question, interesting to all of us, viz., whether and to what extent it may be possible to promote family religion, irrespective of church life.

The 'Apology for the Isolated' has a different bearing. It is an attempted justification of a class of persons admitted to be, at present, few and scattered; who have thought it right, after much consideration, and without sitting in judgment on others, to separate themselves from *all* churches; to stand aloof from much that other Christians count most worthy of admiration; and, in short, without unkindness, to bid farewell to the so-called religious world.

Such a course—in many respects a painful one—ought most assuredly to be entered upon only under the pressure of a strong sense of spiritual obligation. Where that obligation becomes imperative, obedience to it *ought still to be felt as a burden*, even though it be 'the burden of the Lord.' For it is assuredly no light thing to occupy a position so liable as this is to misconception; so likely to be to many 'a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence.'

The 'Apology' proceeds on the assumption that "in the present day *some* are called to follow Christ in this form, and that, whatsoever others may think or do, *by them* the command must be obeyed, and the burden patiently borne." It further admits that 'the called' are as yet *few*, and that it would not be right for others to follow their example, unless they feel more or less *compelled* to do so.

The resolution thus to separate appears, in those who already stand apart, to have been arrived at—

(1) From a deep and settled conviction that churches are now a hindrance rather than a help to practical godliness; that the principle which underlies them all, viz., that God has made it the duty of every Christian

to unite himself with, and to form part of, some organization or other, which claims to be a branch of that great tree under which all the nations of the earth are one day to find shelter, is a false one ; that no religious society or societies of any kind have ever been "entrusted with certain so-called ordinances, accompanied by a right to administer or withhold them at discretion ;" that no organization has been authorized by God to appoint ministers supposed to be able to answer the question, 'What is truth?' or to demand attendance on public worship as a Divine obligation. 'The isolated' tell us that on this matter they have, like others, had their illusions ; but as these have been dispersed, "they have abandoned for ever all expectation of finding any effectual remedy for prevailing spiritual weakness in churches, sects, or denominations of any kind ; *least of all in any new combination*, however simple its supposed basis, or however high its pretensions."

(2) From a conviction that, Christianity being from first to last a SUPERNATURAL thing, the Christian is bound to rest his hopes for the world at large, *as distinct from the elect or 'firstfruits,'* on that direct intervention of God which it is intimated in Scripture will accompany the second advent of the Redeemer ; a hope which the churches, with very few exceptions, repudiate, deny, and despise, imagining that such an expectation tends "to depreciate the value and efficacy of what they are pleased to call 'the dispensation of the Spirit.'"

(3) From the fact that the churches—commanding as they do, the ear of the Christian world, "supplying every week, both from the pulpit and the press, the mental and spiritual food on which modern Christianity

subsists ;" pandering, however unconsciously, on the one hand to *the vanity* which sees in our existing agencies its own glorification, and on the other to *the indolence* which induces men to lean on authority rather than to search the Scriptures for themselves—have become, sometimes in consequence of their proceedings, and sometimes in spite of their wishes, the greatest of all obstacles to advancement in the Christian life.

(4) From the persuasion, well or ill founded, that while it is the believer's duty to watch and pray for the coming of the Lord, he cannot do so without let or hindrance if he habitually unites "in an order of worship which subjects him to influences every way opposed to those he desires to come under ; which pains and injures him by the constant presentation, both in prayer and preaching, of much which he cannot accept ; and which, so far as it acts upon him at all, paralyzes his hope, and deadens his sensibility to what he believes to be the most important of all truths."

These reasons will, of course, be taken by every man for what he deems them to be worth. They are much more likely to be scoffed at than regarded by men who believe that the power of Christianity, like power in other things, is to be seen, not so much in the individual, as in the united and embodied will and purpose of many ; that only by church organizations can Christianity reach its consummation, or work out the regeneration of our world ; that the expectation of Christ's second coming "strips Christianity of its Divine power and purpose ;" that to doubt the triumph of a 'preached gospel' is little short of impiety.

. In vain are such persons referred to the history of the eighteen centuries during which the Church, in one

form or other, has been at work. In vain are they reminded that beliefs, similar in character, and supposed to be sustained by ordinances of Divine appointment, led the Jews of old to reject their Messiah. In vain are they told that the accomplishment of all they expect or hope for—the universal subjection of the world to a Christianity something like our own—would be scarcely worthy of the name of victory; since it could not include the myriads who have to human eye perished during the process. In vain is it suggested that the promises of Scripture may be far wider in their reach than is generally supposed; that they are far too magnificent to admit of being lowered to man's narrow conceptions as to what is worthy of God; that they are far too comprehensive to find any adequate interpretation in thoughts that fall short of the resurrection, and so ignore the educational character of 'the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ;' that their reception has led even Christian men to look upon the world as little better than a profound mystery, human life as an inexplicable enigma, and the Bible itself as at the best a dark lantern, profitable for our immediate steppings, but casting little light beyond them.

The connection which subsists between the 'Isolation' spoken of and 'Household Communion' is obvious enough. For if the administration of the Lord's Supper *at home* by the head of the family must be regarded as unauthorized by Scripture, and an unwarranted intrusion on the rights of a Divinely appointed order of men, separation from churches must be a sin, and may well be condemned as wilful disobedience to God himself.

HOUSEHOLD COMMUNION.

The Household Sacrament.

1. THE word *Sacrament*, which is not a Scriptural one, really means an oath or vow, and is applied by Protestants to the Lord's Supper only by way of emphasis, since in receiving it the Christian is supposed solemnly to renew his dedication to Christ. *Eucharist*, which is a better and more appropriate term, denotes giving of thanks, and therefore with greater propriety designates the same ordinance. It does so because at the Lord's table in commemorating the death of our Redeemer, we express our grateful remembrance of His sufferings on our behalf, and are confirmed in the joyful hope of His second coming.

2. 'Holy Communion' is simply *an act* of faith and love. It is an act that can derive no validity or increased importance whatever from man; it is as personal and individual as prayer; and, like all other spiritual obligations, may be suitably observed in any place, in almost any form, and without any priestly intervention.

3. The communion of *Families* in this sacred rite, were it ever to become general, would only be the revival of a primitive practice, the propriety of which might be shown, not only from the circumstance that, when first instituted by our Lord, this memorial of love was simply a graft on the Jewish passover,—*a household feast*; but also from the character of the ordinance itself, from the nature of the Christian religion, and from such indications of apostolic action as are to be found in Scripture.

4. In the first instance there can be little doubt that the ordinance was frequently observed both at home and in the public assembly: *at home*, when the family was a believing one, and governed accordingly; *in larger assemblies*, when the Ecclesia, meeting as a household of God, consisted of persons who were either more or less separated by their faith in Christ from their heathen or Jewish friends and relatives, *or* of individuals who wished in this way to manifest their love for the brethren, and to show forth the true unity of all believers in their one Lord.

5. That in each of these cases the memorial rite originally followed an evening social meal taken in common, is probable from the time and manner in which the Lord Jesus made Himself known to the two disciples at Emmaus, and from what is

recorded regarding the gross abuses that sprang up at a later period in connection with its observance among the Corinthians. That it was also frequently celebrated apart from any preceding meal, and in early morning, may be gathered from the letter of Pliny to Trajan regarding the practices of the first Christians.

6. Nothing appears, however, that should lead us for a moment to suppose that the Lord's Supper was regarded either by the apostles or by their immediate converts as *more sacred* than services of prayer or praise; that its administration was by them ever associated with the eldership; or that its reception was a privilege confined to persons supposed to be more advanced than others in the Divine life. There is not a syllable in Scripture calculated to indicate that the apostles would have refused to commune with any person with whom they would have been willing to unite in prayer; that they drew any distinction corresponding to that which is now so commonly made between communicants and non-communicants; or that the reception of the bread and wine might lawfully be granted or withheld from any one under given church regulations.¹

¹ The words of St. Paul, 'The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of

7. That he who ate and drank unworthily, 'not discerning the Lord's body,' ate and drank judgment to himself is certainly true, but *not more true* than that he who prayed hypocritically or flippantly, without self-examination, and therefore without regarding the object and end of prayer, increased his condemnation thereby. '*The prayer of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord.*'

8. How then came it about that even before the first century had passed away, new thoughts and feelings respecting this feast of love sprang up, and rapidly developed conclusions, accompanied by a corresponding course of action, highly favourable to clerical supremacy, but fatal to Christian simplicity and spiritual independence ?

9. A reply is furnished by the history of the Church.

Explain the matter as we may, there is no denying the fact that indications of departure from primitive truth present themselves at a very early period. The origin of this decay may be,

Christ?' are commonly held by High Churchmen to prove that the consecration of the elements by a priest is essential to efficacy—The emphasis in this passage, say they, should be laid on '*we*,' signifying not only that an apostolic benediction was necessary, but that it is now equally needful from the lips of an ordained 'successor to the apostles.' It is quite unnecessary to controvert so gratuitous an assumption.


to some extent, obscure; but there is little doubt that it had its root in a mistaken apprehension that the first and chief duty of the Christians was to convert the world, and to establish Christ's kingdom upon the earth forthwith,—a task, the difficulty of which might well justify much that could be defended only on the plea of present necessity.

10. Believing, as they now did, that they had erred in expecting the immediate return of Christ, that the promise of His coming, on which they had depended, was to be spiritually fulfilled,—to be seen only in its effects on the empire, they turned their entire thoughts and energies to the propagation of the faith, and soon found out, or imagined they did, that the primitive elder was unfit for the work to be accomplished. Dr. Jacob speaks of the period as one in which there would be great difficulty in finding men fit for the Ministry, and observes, "There was, however, in many of the towns throughout the Roman empire, a class of men prepared by Divine providence, and better fitted than all others for supplying this need of the Gentile churches." He refers to persons who, having formerly gained their living by teaching heathen philosophy, had now become Christians, and, as was perfectly natural, were anxious to turn their gifts and acquirements to account.

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11. These men, although sincere in their beliefs, were doubtless often needy or ambitious; and when chosen, as they sometimes were, for their gifts rather than for their graces, they naturally endeavoured to alter the character of the eldership, and to lay foundations for a professional ministry. They were, in short, more careful for *the extension* than for the purity of the faith. Such teachers—it may be with the best intentions—soon introduced or sanctioned deviations which brought about what Dean Stanley describes as “the change from what Christianity was, as we see it in the New Testament, to what it became in the next century, and as to a certain extent we have seen it ever since.” Its history became the story “not of an isolated community, or of isolated individuals, but of an organized society,” soon to be incorporated with the political systems of the world.

12. Professor Lightfoot takes a similar view of the period. He observes, “With the overthrow of Jerusalem the visible centre of the Church was removed. The keystone of the fabric was withdrawn, and the whole edifice threatened with ruin. There was a crying need (so the Professor *assumes*) for some organization which should cement together the diverse elements of Christian society, and preserve it from disintegration. *Out*



of this need the Catholic Church arose. The magnitude of the change effected during this period may be measured by the difference in the constitution and conception of the Christian Church, as presented in the pastoral epistles of St. Paul and the letters of St. Ignatius respectively."

13. Dr. Jacob, as we have already seen, thinks "a pressing need had now arisen for some organization to meet the accumulating dangers of the time, and to cement together the diverse elements of Christian society thus threatened with dissolution." He says, "*The establishment of Episcopacy saved the Church*, whatever mischiefs were afterwards wrought by the abuse and perversion of the system." That the apostle John sanctioned the transformation in question has often enough been maintained, but it is an assertion that finds no support whatever either in Scripture or in Church history.

14. What we have to notice, then, as alone proveable is, that before the second century was far advanced there had come into existence, under the direction of a cultivated and professional body of men, a great institution known then and ever since as THE CHURCH; an institution claiming an exclusive right to teach, to administer ordinances, and to exercise discipline. Now, for the first time, the Lord's Supper was to some

extent separated from other acts of worship, declared to be more sacred, and placed under the control of the existing clergy, by whom alone, it was said, could it be properly administered.¹

15. Contemporary history justifies this statement. Justin Martyr, who presented his Apology about A.D. 148, is the first who talks of the 'consecration' of the elements, and of an 'administrator,' phrases which very soon led to the notion that the assistance of a priest was essential. Other perversions quickly followed. Irenæus speaks of *offering a sacrifice*, and maintains that the Eucharist *is* a sacrifice, in a sense opposed to those who contended that all sacrifices had ceased!

16. The one supreme question is—'Were these proceedings of God or of man'? was the process now going on, simply the *designed* and healthy development of principles and practices that had received apostolic sanction, or was it of the nature of apostasy? *If the former*, it is certainly very remarkable that throughout the apostolic epistles no reference should be made to the future existence of any great Christian organization; no instructions given as to its order; no

¹ The reader is referred for further particulars relating to this period, and for reflections thereupon, to "The Churches, a History and an Argument," by Henry Dunn, crown 8vo., 6s. Simpkin, Marshall and Co.

summary of doctrines presented as its basis ; no creed or formulary prepared for its use ; that after the departure of the apostles nothing is left beyond prophetic intimations of approaching corruption and decay. *If the latter*, these pretensions can only be regarded as the forerunners of a system which rapidly developed into priestly tyranny, and ultimately became 'drunk with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus.'

17. To what extent these exclusive claims have been embodied in the Reformed Churches ; how far their maintenance—in degree at least—may be regarded as an ecclesiastical necessity ; whether, for instance, sects could have long existed if they had not gathered around the sacred ordinance ; or what would have been the condition of Christianity amongst us if baptism and the Lord's Supper had not been alike perverted, it may not be either wise or needful to pronounce. The only important question is—Does anything in Scripture either forbid or discourage a return to primitive practice ?

18. That Scriptural authority for confining the administration of the Supper to an ordained body of men does not exist, has frequently been admitted both by clergymen of the Church of England and by Nonconformists. The Rev.

Henry Ward Beecher, in a recent sermon, said to his people, "If you administer the Sacrament yourself, it is just as good [as if it were administered by a Minister]; for the Lord's Supper belongs to every man who belongs to Christ, and he has as much right to administer it to himself as to have it administered to him by a priest." These opinions, observed a well-known clergyman of the Church of England in the *Contemporary Review* (Feb., 1872), "may startle some persons, but in reality they are not far removed even from the orthodoxy of the Church of England. Lay baptism has been generally held valid; and if one sacrament may be administered by the laity, it is really difficult to see why the other may not; and as to the question of a man's administering the Sacrament to himself, it is done every time the priest consecrates, for he always administers the bread and wine to himself first." That these were the opinions of the late Dr. Arnold is well known. In a letter to Sir Thomas Pasley he observes, "Lay baptism was allowed by Hooker to be valid, and *no distinction can be drawn* between one sacrament and another."¹

¹ The writer of these lines is deeply convinced that what is called the ordinance of baptism was never intended for the Christian Church. Its application in Scripture is always confined to Jews or heathen when they were first brought into

What then are the objections that really lie against the revival of household communion under the presidency of the appointed head of the family, as priest in his own house ?

19. *Is it custom,—old English custom ?* But the present custom is not the old one ; for centuries ago the Lord's Supper, though controlled by the priest, was regarded as a family rite. Take as evidence the old Saxon word *housel*. This was the designation given by the Saxons to the Lord's Supper ; and it expressed *among them* the character or quality of the memorial of Christ. As the designation of a household ordinance it remained in use until and long after the Danish Conquest, and will be found in the laws which then regulated or enforced the Eucharist.

20. *Is it in the supposition that no witness to such a practice has been given by confessors or martyrs ?* Such is not the fact : the Lollards witnessed for this truth. The complaint made against them to

the true worship of God, revealed to man as Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Although more than a generation lived and died before the canon of Scripture was completed, *there is not a single instance recorded of the baptism of the child of a believer* ; either as an infant, or later in life in connection with a profession of faith. On the supposition of baptism being what it is now said to be, the omission of any reference to its administration either to child or adult, by sprinkling or by immersion, is simply inexplicable, and indeed inconceivable.

Richard the Second is, that "they impiously declare that by the law of God any faithful man or woman may consecrate the Eucharistic bread and wine without the priest;" and by statute (A.D. 1383) such are commanded to be held in arrest "till they will justify themselves according to the law of holy Church."

21. *Is the objection found in a still lingering notion that the Supper is a purely Church ordinance?* If it be so, why is it administered by the clergy to the sick at home? What is this practice but a remnant of the original household character of the Eucharist? We are charmed by the '*Adieux*' of Adolphe Monod, but their touching beauty would be lost if separated from the household communion which called them forth. Let us beware of the superstition which perverts by exaggeration, and destroys by idolizing.

22. *Is the notion cherished that a family is too restricted for the rite?* Why should it be so considered? The ordinance cannot derive efficacy from the numbers that share in it. As well might it be said that a family is too limited for prayer—too limited for love—too limited to exhibit unity in diversity. The objector forgets that, by the appointment of God, *the family is the social unit*; that in it every member, including domestics, are, in an important sense, ONE.

With strictest propriety therefore, might every household *as such* gather round the table of the Lord, and not lawfully only, but with singular appropriateness and beauty, commemorate together the love of their Redeemer.

23. *Is difficulty found in the fact that ALL the members of a family are rarely regenerated persons?* The objection *assumes* that all church members are regenerate,—which is notoriously untrue ; and further, that none others are to approach the table,—which certainly cannot be shown from Scripture. It is true, *but within limits*, that none but converted persons can engage acceptably in any spiritual exercise, but no one thinks it right on that account to bid the unconverted avoid joining either in prayer or praise. And why ? Simply because we feel, and feel truly, that the real state of human hearts can be known only to God. We make therefore, in this instance, the responsibility their own ; and whatever we may fancy, or whatever may have been the prevailing practice of churches, it is obviously impossible that any rule can be safely and effectually applied in the one case which it would be unsuitable to apply in the other. Every attempt yet made by churches to secure purity by carrying out principles of exclusion has certainly failed ; and it is hard to see, the state of society being what it is, how it *can*

be otherwise, or how the endeavour to separate, by pronouncing on character, *can* issue in anything but mischief. Beyond serious warning and affectionate advice we are powerless.

24. Finally. *Does reluctance to the practice of family communion arise from a consciousness, avowed or concealed, on the part of the head of the household, of inability to carry on such a religious service?* The answer to *that* is,—the Lord's Supper is not a religious service, but AN ACT. It may therefore be taken in silence, and, so received, may prove not less, but more profitable than when accompanied by special prayers, by singing, or by oral addresses. A friend who has thought it right to adopt the household ordinance has found the following order both easy and eligible. He or she (for it is not necessary here to say which is intended), judging it expedient to 'break bread' *at home*, partly to witness against prevailing sacramentarianism, partly to indicate the true unity of a Christian family, and partly to give greater solemnity and importance to household worship, resolved to do so on the Lord's day evening; and as the day had been spent for the most part in public services, it was deemed that a brief, solemn, and silent meeting would be most appropriate. The domestic servants, with other members of the

family, were for this purpose gathered round the table on which was placed a small portion of broken bread and a single glass of wine. The head of the household having set the example, a solemn silence was for a few minutes observed by all. The words were then uttered, 'In memory of the dying love of our Redeemer we eat of this bread and drink of this cup.' The bread having gone round, the words, 'The Lord give us spiritual understanding of His ordinance,' were added, and the wine passed. A short period of silence was again observed, and then a very few words of prayer concluded a meeting at once short and solemn, the effect of which, so far as it was possible to judge, appeared to be all that could be wished. What Christian person, male or female, can plead inability to fulfil in this simple way, the command of Him who said to His disciples, '*Do this till I come*'?

25. The advantages likely to accrue from household communion are many.

(i.) It would give greater importance to family worship; tending, it may be hoped, to lessen the amount of inattention and formality which in that service is so often generated, and secure at the same time more prominence to the great hope of the Church,—the return of the Lord.

(ii.) It would attach greater sacredness to the family itself, and check dissensions therein by associations which are inseparable from the observance of the Lord's Supper.

(iii.) It would exalt *the priesthood of home* by recognising the true position of its head, on whom the sense of spiritual obligation with regard to others would thereby, in all probability, be both deepened and enlarged. Might it not also lead to more systematic Scriptural instruction, by compelling the devotion of a short time every day to preparation for it?

(iv.) If generally adopted, a system of household teaching, crowned by household communion, would effectually correct that mistaken view of the Eucharist which turns the memorial of love into an 'awful sacrifice;' which leads to the supposition that it can only be properly administered after consecration by an ordained minister; and which sanctions, when it does not foster, many Romish superstitions relating thereto.

(v.) On the other hand, it would do more than anything else to check the sectarianism which makes the symbol of love and unity an instrument for declaring and perpetuating differences of

opinion on matters which no one deems to be fundamental, and which all admit ought not to interfere with the love of Christians for each other.

(vi.) In brief, household communion would be at once a counteractive to ecclesiastical pretensions, and a remedy for the evils which afflict seceding bodies when separating from others in order to witness in favour of what is supposed to be a neglected truth. The first would be undermined at the root by so practical a denial of priestly authority. The last would be purified by the expulsion of elements which at once weaken and repel, leading only to division and unbrotherly feeling.

26. A few observations on THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY as the only Divinely ordained organization must conclude these brief remarks.

Whatever differences of opinion may prevail amongst us as to *ecclesiastical* organizations—their structure, their government, or even their existence by Divine authority,—there can be none as to the appointment of THE FAMILY. This institution, sacred above all others, is at once the earliest and the purest, the most unchangeable and the most abiding, that has ever been established upon earth. Churches *may* or may not be—for it is an open question—of apostolic origin; but families are associations emphatically Divine. First in rank

as they are first in order, they, above all others, are intended to be chief as 'means of grace, and conservators of piety.'

27. But men do not usually think so. On the contrary, they apply the phrase 'means of grace' for the most part to what are called the *public ordinances* of religion, and attach a peculiar sanctity to places of public worship. *Why* they do so is greatly owing to the many false associations which have been allowed to gather round terms that are Jewish rather than Christian.

28. Such forms of expression may be harmless enough as figures of speech, but they are eminently misleading. They become absolutely *unchristian* when they teach, as they often do, that persons, when kept away from public worship, should 'thirst after God,' *as an absent one*, and mourn as if 'the sparrow' and 'the swallow' nestling under the eaves of the sacred edifice were happier than they. This is but to parody what has passed away for ever, and to forget the teaching of the Lord to the woman of Samaria.

29. Greatly is it to be lamented that so many believers in the nineteenth century have yet to learn that their places of worship, consecrated or unconsecrated, are *in no special sense whatever* the abodes of God; that He manifests Himself *there* in no higher form than at the hearth of the humblest of

His children ; and that if there be—which there is not—any inequality of rank between what we call, unwisely, even in figure, the ‘house of God’ and the ‘domestic altar,’ the advantage is with the latter, since the church exists for the family, and not the family for the church.

30. Yes ; start as we may at the assertion, the family is *the normal organization for worship* ; in itself prior, if not superior, to what we call the church, although often needing the congregation to supplement its work by gathering together converts not yet embedded in families ; to evangelize the world, so far as that can be done by the public preaching of the Gospei ; to bring ‘the called’ into a fellowship of love, of support, and of protection which shall be *to them* what family life at a later period may become ; to instruct and to prepare the inexperienced for the fulfilment of duties which will one day devolve upon them as heads of households ; to *make up* for the absence of that school of self-instruction to which they ought to be looking forward ; and—alas that it should have to be added !—to compensate for the absence of any efficient domestic teaching in but too many homes which bear the Christian name.

31. That the temptation to cast away this ‘birth-right’ is, in the present day, very powerful, cannot be disputed. The ‘mess of pottage’ everywhere

obtrudes itself on men who hunger far more after wealth than after righteousness ; and on men too who, with Divine tastes, yet feel or fancy that their *first* duty is to preserve for their children a given rank in society, and their *second* to train them for the skies.

32. As a consequence, on every hand, though on different grounds, is *inability* to carry on domestic teaching earnestly pleaded ; and *if the assistance of the pulpit be subsidized*, few are distressed by the recollection that they are habitually neglecting one of the most sacred of their obligations. Who, it is often said, now has *time* to be the religious instructor of his family ? How few, again, it is responded, are *competent* to the task, even if they had the time ! It might but too often be added, How rarely does the father exercise that measure of *authority* over his household which is essential to its accomplishment ! How seldom has he that amount of *moral influence* over his dependants, whether children or servants, which is always needful to render teaching effective !

33. Such are the sentiments now commonly in vogue amongst us ; sentiments avowed, sometimes with indifference and sometimes with sadness ; nearly all agreeing that it is much more consonant with modern ideas, and, as they willingly persuade themselves, much more beneficial, that

the work should be transferred to the minister and paid for in coin, than that it should be left either to the prayers or to the pains of the priest in his own house. The possibility of its being neglected altogether is regarded as a contingency from which there is no escape.

34. Ought we not then to try, in some degree at least, to raise Christian men out of this 'slough of despond;' to awaken them to a consciousness of their true position; to set forth what a Christian household ought to be, and to teach that this claim of God for household teaching and communion is specially fitted to meet the emergencies of these days; to counteract the all but overpowering tendency to materialism which now threatens to sweep society away in a torrent of unbelief; to check the overwhelming eagerness with which men at present engage in the strife for daily bread; and to secure, at whatever cost, at least *one calm hour every day* for the elevation of character, and for the contemplation of things which, though unseen, are eternal?

FAMILIES AND CHURCHES.—“Persons,” says John Howe, “are elements of families. Families are the elements of which both churches and kingdoms, or commonwealths, are composed and made up; and as the one sort of these is purely civil, the other purely sacred, that which is elementary unto both must be both.” The Family alone has this twofold character. It is at once a civil

and a sacred thing. It is both a monarchy and a church. Its rightful head is a king and a priest. Perhaps it would not be going too far to affirm that it is *the only* organization which has now existing, is unquestionably of Divine appointment.

ECCLESIASTICAL ORGANIZATIONS.—John Foster, the essayist, than whom no one ever recognized more distinctly differences between the Church and the world, adopted, and through life clung to the opinion, that all ecclesiastical organizations “are useless and mischievous, and the sooner they are dissolved the better.” To what extent this repudiation of all churches *as external bodies* is capable of being justified; it is needless to inquire. Let this point be decided as it may, family organization still remains. Earth presents no sight more beautiful or heavenly than the meeting of a pious family at the footstool of God; there, if anywhere, is the heart softened, the conscience quickened, the love of God promoted, and love to man ratified.

THE HOUSEHOLD ECCLESIA.—The Christian Household is now the only religious organization in which worship is made the basis of communion; the only fellowship with which ecclesiastical or sectarian interests do not intermingle; the only *ecclesia* over which the “mystery of iniquity” has not cast its shadow. That ‘the Church’ is “a family” has long since been admitted. The time is approaching when every rightly ordered family will come to be regarded as a Church; *the father* its priest by Divine appointment; *itself* the highest exponent of the religious life.



AN

APOLOGY FOR THE ISOLATED.



AN APOLOGY, &c.

1. IT has pleased God in these latter days, for reasons no doubt infinitely wise and good, to separate certain Christians from their fellow-believers ; sometimes *outwardly*, by indisposing them to visible union with any of our existing churches or sects, but more frequently by restraining the gratification they once enjoyed in such intercourse, and thus occasioning them, in spirit at least, to stand aloof from much that the religious world counts most worthy of admiration.

2. These isolated ones, few in number, comparatively very few, one here and another there, find themselves—it may be in consequence of peculiar spiritual discipline and Divine leading—out of harmony with the present aspect of Christianity ; not alienated in heart from other Christians, but living a somewhat different inward life ; not setting up a claim to be regarded as better, wiser, or more spiritual than others, but saddened by inability to perceive the excellence of a great deal that goes on around them ; saddened still more by the percep-

tion of evils which Christians generally either cannot perceive, or only regard as indications that everything human is defective.

3. The position of these believers is not a pleasant one. To find one's self out of harmony with things as they are ; to experience no satisfaction in what others delight in ; to believe that God has no pleasure in modes of thought and action which are commonly regarded as encircled by His favour, and honoured by evident proofs of His approbation, is by no means an enviable condition. To sensitive minds it is a very painful one, since it necessarily leads to more or less of isolation, and consequently to a good deal of misconception, if not of unkindness. Nevertheless it is unquestionable that, in the present day, *some* are 'called' to follow Christ in this form, and, whatever others may think or do, *by them* the command must be obeyed, and the burden patiently borne.

4. In speaking of certain persons as 'called of God' to bear this particular burden, I am referring, for the most part, to a class of aged and experienced Christians who, so far as my experience goes, are more thoughtful and earnest in their study of Scripture than others ; more open-minded, and more anxious to receive 'the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ,'—to know, in short, what is 'the hope of their calling, and what the riches of the glory of their inheritance

in the saints.' In these respects, whatever may be their failings, they stand *distinguished* from the many who are content with hereditary teaching, who bow before church authority, who follow honoured commentators, and who regard independent inquiry as unsettling and dangerous.

5. It is not easy to speak of these isolated ones *as a whole*, since they are generally marked by strong individualism, and do not always escape the dangers which arise from too great mental loneliness. As students of Scripture they are often wrong in their conclusions, since they are not unfrequently led to attach too much importance to particular views of truth, especially of unfulfilled prophecy. The human mind being what it is, diversity of judgment is inseparable from earnest and independent inquiry ; but whether right or wrong in any particular instance, these diggers for hidden treasure, one and all, find out *how great is the blessing involved in the search*.

6. In prosecuting their investigations these students, in common with many others in the present day, have, for the most part, arrived at a conviction that, however learned or devout the great theologians of the past might be, they have, in their love of system, and especially in their desire to exalt visible churches as God's chosen agency, most unwarrantably narrowed the Divine goodness, limited both the value and extent of redeeming love,

diminished the glory of the Saviour, and kept altogether out of sight the second advent of the King, the establishment of His everlasting kingdom on the new earth, and the final restoration, through its kings and priests, of myriads of rebels to loyalty and love.

7. It is this conviction, more than any other, that renders it impossible for them to take complacency in ministrations which proceed on the assumption that an entirely opposite view of things is the true one ; which either ignore altogether the existence of the elect as the body of Christ, or else make its calling the exclusive object of the Gospel message ; which proceed on the supposition that God has committed to the churches, as their chief work, the regeneration of mankind ; which insist therefore on the necessity for a professional ministry, for mixed worship, for limited teaching, for what are called church ordinances, and for the support of a mass of religious machinery which seems, to some of us at least, at once complex and unspiritual.

8. In vain are the objectors told that God has honoured these agencies by giving them success ; that men of faith and piety sustain them by their prayers ; that even the irreligious acknowledge their value ; that without them the world would lose the benefits of Christian civilization. They know all this. They do not dispute what is asserted. But

they know also that the great, the gigantic evils which perplex and distress modern society are not overcome by our existing Christianity ; that it stands before them *all but powerless*. They know further that what is urged on behalf of the Christianity of our day might with equal justice be said of almost everything, however defective, that has, at any period of the world's history, been worked by good men, from good motives, and for good ends ; that it may be said of Judaism, of ancient Christianity, of the Empire Church, and of modern Romanism ; that it may be said also of all the Reformed Churches, however cold or dead ; that it may be said of religious establishments, and of every sect and denomination, from so-called Irvingism to Brethrenism, whether tyrannized over by leaders, or mixed up with all kinds of interests and ambitions ; whether claiming to be itself *the* Church of Christ, or content to allow that it is but a part of the mystical body.

9. Yet none of these organizations ever did or ever will submit to be told that they are seriously defective ; that perchance the day of their usefulness has passed ; that a time must come, if it be still future, when, like the long-honoured brazen serpent, they will be pronounced worthless, and cast away as mischievous. Nor will they be persuaded that all organizations become so whenever they stand in the way of spiritual progress ; when-

ever they depress instead of elevating the Christian standard ; whenever they retard the true unity of Christ's people ; whenever they confound the Church and the world together ; whenever they magnify themselves and their doings, and smile at the expectation of any future Divine interposition of a supernatural kind as needless and unwarranted.

10. The rise and gradual extension of a class like that I have been describing is itself a sign of the times. It may be regarded as one among many indications that changes are at hand,—that the old is wearing out, that the new has not yet come to the birth. The prevailing restlessness and dissatisfaction which commonly precede *political* change may be regarded as a type of the internal and suppressed sorrow which weighs on the few thoughtful spirits to whom it is given to discern hollowness and unreality *earlier* than others ; to perceive it *before* God in His providence and by His judgments has made the true state of things manifest to all men.

11. The existence of like forebodings in Judea about the time of our Lord's first advent may be discovered in what is said of the one here, and another there, who were 'waiting for the consolation of Israel ;' waiting, that is, with chastened hopes for the fulfilment of prophecies they had anxiously studied, but little understood ; in utter ignorance of

'the times and the seasons' of its accomplishment; in ignorance also of the methods and agencies by which the Divine promises would be fulfilled; not knowing *what* to expect, or *when* to expect it, yet persuaded that the day spoken of by 'holy men of old' was not far off, and who, from their state of mind, were prepared to welcome *any kind* of manifestation of God's gracious purposes, assured that such manifestation, come in what shape it might, would bring with it 'the refiner's fire and the fuller's soap;' would tend to the exposure of unrealities and hypocrisies; would be promotive of righteousness; and so, whether humbling or otherwise, be *a step in advance*.


12. The spiritual condition of Jerusalem at the time in question was probably not very different from that which now obtains among ourselves. It was certainly far better than it had been at many previous periods. Idolatry and profanity had been effectually put down. Sadducees indeed there were, who believed neither in angel nor spirit, but they were *religious* Sadducees, adherents of the established order, and not unwilling to hold the office of high priest. There were Herodians too, but they, like our Church and State politicians, were the enemies of change. There were scribes also, who supported the existing framework of society, and who called it Divine. There were Pharisees in abundance—some of them zealous ritualists,

others superstitiously and boastfully devout, and many mere hypocritical formalists; but not a few were faithful to the law of Moses, more or less spiritually minded,—men striving to do the will of God from the heart. The great feasts were probably never better attended; the synagogues were numerous and well filled. The Rabbi had greetings in the market-place, and a chief seat on all occasions of social festivity. The people, as a whole, were outwardly devout, and many of them scrupulously attentive to the various observances of the Mosaic economy. Whatever political discontent might prevail, satisfaction with the religious state of things was all but universal; and if the coming of Messiah was hoped for, it was under the belief that his advent would strengthen the Jewish Church, enlarge its boundaries, and, in due time, bring the nations of the earth under its sway. Any other kind of Messiah must have been to an orthodox Israelite inconceivable. *Was this state of things so very different from our own?*

13. Yet *here* a worm was at the root, and, as it would seem, a few there were at least who knew it; who had insight enough to perceive that the apparent spiritual prosperity in which so many rejoiced was sapped; that unrealities had eaten out the heart of Judaism; that Sadducean scepticism and Pharisaic ritualism, while apparently opposed to each other, really combined to foster an all but

universal formalism in religion, to attach men more than ever to the outward, and to satisfy them that whatever might be their actual condition, God himself was pledged to support, to enlarge, and to make triumphant that which He and He alone had established. That anything could interfere with the teachings of those who sat in Moses' seat was, generally speaking, to the Jew, whatever sect or school he might belong to, simply incredible. The few who thought otherwise, the scattered ones of that day, could do little more than silently retire from notice, accept the isolation to which they were doomed, look up, pray, and 'wait for the consolation of Israel.'

14. The scattered ones among ourselves are in like condition. They stand alone and wait. They do not deny that in many respects society has improved ; they admit that at first sight, and viewing the matter superficially, it may seem questionable whether, as a fact, religion *is* at a low ebb,—whether, instead of bemoaning our condition, it does not rather become us to give thanks, to be hopeful, and to take courage. They allow that coarseness and profanity are now generally discouraged ; that evangelical sentiment has permeated the community ; that churches and chapels multiply ; that rival sects boast themselves in the increase of their converts ; that money is now easily obtained for almost any charitable purpose that phil-



anthropic ingenuity can devise ; that Bibles, tracts, and missionaries are despatched to the ends of the earth ; and that, to the outward eye, indications are not wanting of the coming triumph of the Gospel in the subjugation of all peoples to its sway.

15. The misfortune—if so it may be termed—is that these people see, or think they see, beyond all this ; that they discern, or imagine they discern, below the surface, society *honeycombed* by advancing Atheism, by doubt, by superstition, by singular tendencies in favour of philosophic paganism, by unreality in religion, by an all-absorbing devotion to getting gain, by singular complacency in what is called ‘progress,’ and by a very general denial that we have any right to expect supernatural interventions, *except in forms harmonizing with, and tending to advance the prosperity of existing undertakings*. Hence it is that ‘the isolated,’ while ready enough to allow for all that is good in our time, often feel heart-broken and humiliated at the coldness, the want of spiritual power, the ignorance of Scripture, and the indifference to its teachings, which so widely prevail among Christians ; and, right or wrong, they cannot but associate this state of things with a condition of public sentiment *created* by the churches.

16. But this cannot, by Christians generally, be allowed. The slightest suggestion that the churches are in fault is everywhere resented as an intolerable

supposition. This or that church, it is readily allowed, may be mischievous in the highest degree; but *the principle* on which they all rest, involving as it does the obligation to form such societies, cannot be so, since it is assumed to be Divine. Christians are prepared for the most part to pardon anything rather than the separation of a believer from *all* churches. Such an one, if not engaged in preaching on his own account, *must*, say they, be irreligious. If he preaches it is otherwise. In that case, although the doctrine diffused may be more than doubtful, the ignorance displayed as unbounded as the conceit of the orator, and the mischief done incalculable,—all will be readily condoned, since, however unworthily, the man thus engaged is supporting the system on which the whole religious world rests. He is, at all events, not setting so bad an example as the one who habitually remains in his closet to read and pray while others are engaged in public service.

17. So with regard to joining a church. Christians are willing enough to allow a man to attach himself to any community he chooses, however unscriptural or unspiritual it may be, but they cannot tolerate a freedom which claims the right of standing aloof from them all, and which therefore practically, though silently, condemns not only the great and world-wide organizations which have for ages demanded to rule the souls of men, but also,

in degree, every ecclesiastical association which, in one form or other, identifies discipleship with adherence to a given church, sect, or denomination. To stand apart *from all these* it is assumed can be nothing less than to violate the Divine order, to pour contempt on a settled ministry, to slight public worship, to think lightly of the fellowship of the saints, and to neglect that avowal before the world of oneness with believers which every Christian is bound to make.

18. The main justification of this severity of judgment, however, is supposed to be found in the assumption—a perfectly gratuitous one—that the command of Christ, ‘Preach the gospel to every creature,’ could not be obeyed if the established order were to be interfered with. What, it is said, would then become of the Divine proclamation? How could the message of mercy be brought home to entire populations?

19. I do not think it so very difficult to answer that question. But before doing so I venture to ask, ‘Is it by any means certain that the command in question really implies all that it has been supposed to imply?’ The command could not mean, ‘Perform an impossibility!’ for it always has been, and still is, as impossible to convey the good news of Christ’s salvation to every child of man as it would be for us to raise the dead, or to create a new universe. The command,

as given to the apostles, evidently meant, 'No longer confine your ministrations to Judea, but preach the Gospel *in witness* among all people ; since it is the design of God, out of every tribe and nation, to call out an election of grace. St. Paul tells us distinctly that this was done in his day. *We* carry on the work, if we do so aright, in the same sense and for the same end, since in no other form can the Lord's command be possibly obeyed.

20. But does not this limitation of our power carry with it, *as a necessity*, the enforced ignorance of all but the comparatively few ? And is it not a great fact, explain it as we may, that in days gone by, as now, the mass of mankind—a huge majority of the race—have never heard the name of Christ in any sense which implies *the possibility* of their either accepting or rejecting the great salvation. How then can every man's eternal condition be decided—as we are perpetually told it is—by his belief or unbelief *here and now* ? And how, except on the supposition, abundantly sustained by Scripture, that the elect of earth are chosen, not for their own sakes, but for the benefit of others,—chosen in order that *elsewhere*, as well as here, they may, under Christ, be rulers and teachers, can the message of love be delivered ? How otherwise is it possible to conceive of the myriads of human beings, who pass from hence in

ignorance and sin, being trained for the eternal enjoyment of God and of holiness ?

21. As there is 'but one name given under heaven whereby men can be saved,' so there is but one method by which salvation,—which is deliverance *from sin*,—is possible, and that involves, here or elsewhere, faith in the Divine Redeemer, sanctification by the Holy Spirit, and holiness, as the fruit thereof, *worked out by the sinner himself* through that loving discipline, however painful, which always supposes God working in a man 'to will and to do' of His good pleasure. Worlds may come and go ; man's place of abode may change ; but God changes not, and in all worlds and under all circumstances His great designs in Christ will be perfectly carried out, and mankind, *as a whole*—I say not every individual,—be finally elevated, purified, and blest. The future human kingdom of the Redeemer after the Resurrection supposes all this ; and, consciously or unconsciously, that truth is recognised every time we pray, 'Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as in heaven.'

22. Let us make our choice then, as in the sight of God, and act on one of two alternatives. The case stands thus :—

If what is commonly taught be true ; if God has committed to His Church, as its most sacred trust, the conversion of the world ; if the ever-

lasting condition of our fellow-men depends on our zeal or want of zeal in diffusing the Gospel,—common humanity should teach us that to that one work every other should give way ; time, money, health, personal advancement, even growth in the Divine life itself, is in that case not worth a thought if weighed in the balances with the widest diffusion of the glad tidings of salvation. And the belief by most men that such is the case fully accounts for *the theory* held by the churches that to this one work every other must be subordinated.

23. But if it be otherwise ; if this world of ours is, for the most part, but an initiatory state of existence ; if beyond its threescore years and ten may be discerned a vast mission-field rich in promise and boundless in extent ; if it be true, as a devout Christian poet sings,—

“This earth is but for learning and for training ;
Earth’s highest work but such as children do :
The workmen here their priceless skill are gaining ;
The true life-work is yonder, out of view,”

all our conceptions of life change ; fitness for ‘the day of the Lord’ and for His work is now the supreme object of attention and of desire ; *doing* comes to be regarded of *comparatively* little moment ; *being or becoming* is everything.

24. Nor does this entire dedication of a man to what may be called his Christian perfection—

involving, as it does, likeness to Christ, entire submission to the Father, deadness to the world's attractions and ambitions, intense reality of character, and the maintenance of *that sacred individuality* which rejects all influences that would mould us after any human pattern—weaken in any degree his influence on those that are without. On the contrary, it deepens it, since God himself has ordained that in proportion to our own individual piety will be our desire to bring others to the Redeemer, and probably our success in accomplishing it.

25. That the apostle Paul *advises* Christians not to forsake the assembling of themselves together is certain ; but it is somewhat repulsive to hear this half-text perpetually quoted by men who *mean* by it anything but what the apostle did, since he adds, 'But *exhorting one another*, and the more as ye see the day approaching.' This is a very different thing from supporting any sect or denomination whatever.

26. Neither is it just to pretend that separation from churches implies a conscientious inability to aid any good work carried on by them, or that it forbids occasional union with others either in public worship or at the Supper of the Lord, whenever that course seems to be advisable. Still less does it imply anything like abstinence from Christian work. What it *does* imply is a belief

that God gives to every man *his own work* to do, and that his first duty is, if possible, to ascertain what that is and to do it, rather than to share in the obligations of others, or to be content with being harnessed in any ecclesiastical team whatever. What it *does* imply is *positive refusal to submit* to that form of moral pressure, now so common, which insists on a man's attendance at public worship under pain of being accounted *irreligious*; a determination to resist that form of pious intolerance which brands a man with ungodliness if he declines, for whatever reason, to support that which one of the oldest, most experienced, and honoured of Nonconformist ministers has declared to be "a solecism in thought and an hypocrisy in act." For so he speaks of public worship as carried on in England, expressing his conviction that "there is not an example" of public worship like our own "in the whole Bible;" that, as it exists amongst us, "it is one of the greatest misfortunes of the age, and that if there is any one thing more offensive than another, it is the amount of hypocrisy presented in so-called worshipping services." *

27. What isolation *does* imply is a fixed determination to uphold household instruction and household communion as higher and more beneficial than that which is congregational; a resolu-

* The Rev. J. H. Hinton, at the Baptist Union for 1866.

tion to maintain that private prayer and meditation are, when real, far more spiritual and profitable than following the petitions of another, or listening to his discourses; that personal study of the Scriptures is more useful than bowing before their exposition from the pulpit; and that therefore a Sabbath at home *may be* and ought to be every way more advantageous than one spent in public assemblies.

28. It should never be forgotten that public worship, at the best, is but an *elementary* form of piety. It is, *in its most favourable aspects*, only a means to an end. But not thus is it generally regarded. It is commonly spoken of as *the highest form* of the religious life; one to which the pious must conform if they would enter 'the courts of the Lord,' and come into His more immediate presence. The late Dean Alford could write, "Of all places for prayer, God's house is the best. Prayer *in the church* is the purest, the highest, the least selfish of all prayer. He who would purify himself comes here to draw water out of the wells of salvation; comes here for that application to himself of the body and blood of Christ in the sacrament of His own appointing, whereby the life of purity and holiness is nourished within. He that would purify himself seeks above all for the grace of His ordinances in the assembly of His people." To the careless and ungodly, public

worship is always spoken of as the appointed means of grace, little if any notice being taken of other means of grace, and the presence of Christians is continually urged, were it only as *an example*.

29. That the habit of attending church or chapel may, and often does, lead to something much higher and better than itself cannot be denied, but at what cost this advantage is gained had better perhaps be kept out of sight. Who does not know that going to church, and taking others thither, has all but universally come to occupy the place of that personal influence which every Christian is bound to exercise on behalf of Christ and truth? Even parents not unfrequently think themselves absolved from any direct communication with their children on religious subjects by the fact that they secure for them what they call 'a preached Gospel.'

30. Of course it will be said that most men are unfit to be entrusted with the culture of their own souls; that they are generally indisposed to spiritual exercises; that public worship promotes instead of hindering that which is more personal and private; and that, were it only as an example to others, every Christian man is bound to support both by his presence and pecuniary aid an institution which, whatever may be its defects, is essential to the very existence of Christianity.

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31. Put the matter in another form, and we shall probably be nearer the truth. Men have so long been accustomed to depend on others for the excitement of religious feeling, that they have all but lost the ability for spiritual self-cultivation. They are indisposed to lonely devotional exercises because they find it so much pleasanter *to be acted upon* by another. They substitute, therefore, the religion of the church or the chapel for that of the household and of the heart, because it saves time, favours indolence, and passes in the world for godliness.

32. Do not let the isolated ones be called uncharitable for speaking thus. They are driven to do so in their own defence. As has been already said, they are simply apologizing for what is regarded as an erratic course ; and if in doing this they seem to attack others, it is merely because they can in no other way offer a justification of their peculiar position.

33. Let it be well understood, then, that these persons have now taken their ground, and that they mean to abide by it. They will not be driven therefrom either by sneers or reproaches. They believe themselves to be acting under Divine guidance, and they feel that if they can do but little to arrest a downward course which is but too likely, before many years are over, to win for the Church

the title of an Organized Hypocrisy, they can at least bear witness to what they believe to be true, and so deliver their own souls. Beyond this they are content to *ponder and wait*,—wait for further manifestations of the Divine will, and endeavour, in private intercourse, to keep alive a faith in God which is fast passing out of sight, lost amid a chaos of conflicting beliefs, of self-glorifying sects, and of ecclesiastical assumptions.

34. Thus looking at God, and Truth, and man's way of doing good, I claim for the isolated at least *honesty*, an honesty not incompatible with humility, in believing—whether right or wrong in their judgments—that the churches have, in many respects, been long teaching error; that the fruit of that teaching, like all such fruit of very slow growth, is at length becoming visible, in consequence of our having reached a period of mental activity altogether unprecedented, and one in which the triumphs of scientific investigation have generated a desire to subordinate Christianity itself to material progress. I claim for them an honesty that is quite separable from arrogance, self-complacency, or a tendency to judge others, in believing, as they do, that *spiritually* clouds and darkness are settling over us; that vital religion was never at a lower ebb than it is now amongst Christian professors; that decay underlies all those outward signs of moral health which so many rejoice in;

that we are not what we seem to be ; that likeness to Christ is becoming comparatively rare ; that amid all ourdoings the Christian character is not ripening ; that differences long supposed to obtain between the converted and the unconverted, the Church and the world, are now either denied or altogether ignored ; that, as a fact, there is at present little difference between the one and the other in the intensity of their devotion to business, in greed of gain, or in the character of their reading or amusements ; that, among all alike, *a Christianized conventional standard* has taken the place of the severer law of Scripture ; that, in short, we are gradually, but rapidly, changing the conditions of the Divine life, disclaiming the obvious meaning of the Sermon on the Mount, and, by common consent, expelling from Christianity what has been termed 'the pilgrim and stranger element.'

35. Surely it is worth considering whether *something* must not be wrong when we are told that the great Hindoo reformer said of us, "I saw Christ's *hand* in England, but I did not see Christ's heart and soul in England. I saw the hand of Christ outstretched for doing good everywhere ; but I nowhere saw Him who went on the mountains to pray, who overcame temptation by the all-conquering force of God, who lived in daily communion with Him. To Christ God was everything. To England He seems almost, if not quite nothing.

England is still far from the kingdom of heaven." And why did he say this? Mainly because he saw the teaching of the Lord in the sermon on the mount everywhere evaded or reduced; regarded, in short, as merely involving general principles, the application of which was to depend on circumstances, and to be decided by every man for himself.

36. That such *is* the way in which that noble discourse is now treated few will deny. Many good men insist that in so regarding it "the common sense and instinct of Christians have, on the whole, caught its true meaning." They judge thus because the supernatural is denied. That Christian men *acting* on the Lord's instructions have reason to expect that He will ever so control events that *anything* should happen *to them* which would not happen in similar circumstances to an unbeliever is accounted a fanatical notion having no basis in truth. We are frankly told that "it is impossible to conceive three things, at first sight, more opposite to the sermon on the mount than war, law, and trade. Yet Christian society has long since made up its mind about them, and we all accept them as among the necessities or occupations of human society." I, for one, do not believe that war, law, or trade, when honestly and righteously conducted are necessarily opposed to the sermon on the mount, but modern notions

regarding them certainly are opposed to it. The consequence is that Christianity as seen in the New Testament is one thing, and Christianity as seen in the practice of the Church is another thing, and something diverse. Sceptics dwell on this diversity. So clearly do *they* perceive the supernatural element in Scripture that they reject the revelation we honour *on that account*. They tell us, and most truly, that we compromise matters by "retaining a *verbal belief* in doctrines which have been emptied of their old meaning, and by converting what was once a *disturbing* force into a force identical in its direction with those of earthly origin, though more elevating in its character."

37. It is not therefore, as some think, from the love of indulging an eccentric individualism, or from the workings of spiritual pride, that certain persons are now becoming alienated from institutions that were once their joy, but from a despairing conviction that the glory has departed from them,—that they are no longer a defence against either the world, the flesh, or the devil. No one, of course, can be insensible to the fact that many fellowships may be pointed out in which Christian virtues abound. Nor can any one deny that many admirable sermons are preached, or that much good is derived from them. Still the effect these discourses produce is greatly exaggerated. Hearers of sermons may for the most part be

ranged under three classes. They consist—first, of the *intellectually alive* who listen and are interested or irritated, benefited or injured, according to the impression they receive of the power or the weakness of the preacher. There are, secondly, the *spiritually alive*, who, coming with prepared minds, are both pleased and profited when they hear what they believe to be truth illustrated and enforced from the pulpit. There are, finally, the many who belong to that large class, young or old, with whom church-going is a *habit*, formed probably by parents or teachers, and continued because it is respectable, because it somewhat relieves the tedium of a day during which business is suspended, and because it is supposed to be a duty, the performance of which at once insures the religious education of their children, and is a good example to inferiors. These for the most part ‘hear as if they heard not,’ yet are pleased if a religious emotion is now and then excited, and are always apt to suppose that they pray if prayer is offered in their presence, and that they praise God when they join in singing whatever words may be presented to them.

38. With these things, however, ‘the isolated’ have nothing to do. If good be done thereby they rejoice; where evil results they mourn; but neither the one nor the other affects their position, inasmuch as they separate, not from this or that form of

church government ; *not from persons* at all, but *from principles*, or rather, from the one ruling principle that underlies alike the great corrupt ecclesiastical bodies that dominate in the East and in the West; and the humblest fellowship that can be found in any Protestant community, viz., the supposed obligation resting on every Christian to unite himself with, and to form part of, some organization or other which claims to be a branch of that great tree under which all the nations of the earth are one day to find shelter; the obligation to recognise a society or societies Divinely appointed, and entrusted with certain so-called ordinances, accompanied by a right to administer or withhold them at discretion; justifying therefore the maintenance of a professional ministry supposed to be able, as a rule, to answer the question, 'What is truth?' and claiming by virtue of a Divine appointment to conduct public worship, to train the young, and to preach what each supposes to be the Gospel to all men.

39. In standing apart therefore, as they do, 'the isolated' wish it to be distinctly understood that, while in church matters they separate themselves from others under an imperative obligation, and for what they regard justifiable reasons, they invite no man to follow their example. Imagining themselves to be *specially called of God* to occupy the position they do, they dare not ask any one to do

the same who is not conscious of such an obligation. Society being what it is, and the great mass of men having been trained to depend on others for their spiritual edification, the probabilities are that any abrupt termination of the existing order of things would be most mischievous. The early Christians were as disinclined as they were unable to sweep away Judaism. They were not called to do anything of the kind. God did *that* work in His own way and in His own time, by agencies very different from any that could have been anticipated. It will be so again; and till then it becomes seceders to be silent,—not irritating any by useless opposition to their idols, but parting from them, if parting be necessary, in kindness, and not in wrath; uniting, it may be, with them occasionally in services not altogether approved; acting, in short, very much as the first Christians acted in relation to the temple and the synagogue.

40. But more than this,—‘the isolated’ believe separation to be *as yet* a duty to which few are called, and they know but too well how much it costs some men to obey the call. They have themselves, generally speaking, been careful not to act hastily. Like many others, they have had their illusions, and indulged hopes that in some improved form of church order or government healing might be found. They have now abandoned for ever all expectation of finding any

effectual remedy for prevailing spiritual weakness, in churches, sects, or denominations of any kind ; *least of all in any new combination*, however simple its supposed basis, or however high its pretensions. They have seen such attempts successively break down and become useless in consequence of what seems to be inseparable from such secessions,—narrowness, exclusiveness, and the indulgence of that sort of intolerance which is always engendered by want of breadth, and often by *want of power* to understand the possibility of others occupying a position different from our own without some deficiency in faith or in integrity.

41. Thus feeling, they can look only to God. They fall back therefore upon the conviction that Christianity being what it professes to be, and what all its loyal adherents know it really is,—an individual thing, and A SUPERNATURAL thing ; recognisable in its planting, in its early development, and in its continued vitality in each individual heart, as a life hid with Christ in God ; recognisable also in the record we have of the early history of our world, of the Divine dealings with Abraham and his descendants, of the predictions and teachings of the prophets, and emphatically of the life of Christ, as, from first to last, a Divine history, they cannot but conclude that as it was ushered into the world by the supernatural, so its final triumph—the blessed consummation of all

its promises—will be brought about by further supernaturalism of a like kind, but far grander and more striking than any that accompanied its introduction. Their hopes therefore rest on the direct intervention of God in favour of truth and righteousness ; on some actual and obvious breaking in from the invisible of powers hitherto unknown to us by actual experience ; in short, on some new and signal manifestation of that *supernatural* element in Christianity which is now everywhere denied and despised.

42. Against the indulgence of any such expectation, the churches with one accord set themselves, as tending to depreciate the value and efficacy of what they are pleased to call 'the dispensation of the Spirit.' What they cannot endure is want of faith in existing agencies, in churches and chapels, in sermons and prayer meetings, in revivals and religious excitements, in Bible and missionary societies, in tract distributing and platform oratory, in almost all that *to them* is characteristic of 'the dispensation of the Spirit,'—the channels, as they think, through which the Holy Spirit acts,—the *appointed* means for the world's conversion.

43. Actively and passively, in every possible form the churches glorify these instrumentalities, and will not listen for a moment to any voice that supposes the possibility of their being set aside.

Commanding, as they do, the ear of the Christian world; supplying every week, both from the pulpit and the press, the mental and spiritual food on which modern Christianity subsists; persuading people, as they have done, that but for them the religion of the family would wither and die, that youth would be uninstructed, philanthropic effort fail of support, and the world, abandoned to its wickedness, soon go to ruin, they have closed every avenue to teaching other than their own, and rendered their removal 'as an unclean thing' essential to advance, if we are ever to get rid of sensuous ritualism, of conflicting doctrines, or of that passive acquiescence in prayers and preaching which seems to be inseparable from worshipping in crowds, and which is popular because it affords such abundant scope for that sort of devout formalism which human nature rejoices in, and is compatible either with the indulgence of mere æsthetic feeling, or with that absence of mind in service which is so often manifested by one sex in indifference, and by the other in attention to dress and decoration.

44. I have spoken of the future human kingdom of Christ commencing at the Resurrection as the great hope of humanity, but who does not know that the churches refuse to listen to any such hope or expectation? Absorbed in their own work, and filled with a sense of its infinite importance, the only kingdom they know or care for is the one

that, as they imagine, is forming by themselves during the present dispensation. They call it by the absurd title of 'the kingdom of grace,' as if such a *kingdom* were intelligible, and they bid us be assured that it will one day find its completion in 'the kingdom of glory,' by which they understand the happiness of heaven enjoyed in common with the holy angels. No wonder that, amid these vain imaginings, belief in the resurrection of the body and the return of Christ is rejected in favour of the vague supposition that, at death, the soul of the believer enters at once upon perfected immaterial joys, while that of the unbeliever is either eternally tormented, or altogether and for ever destroyed.

45. To expect *supernatural interference* of any kind in favour of Christianity is by the churches regarded as both unreasonable and blameworthy ; as if such a hope necessarily implied *distrust* either in the power or in the promises of God. Nor do they seem to see that every argument they bring forward against the expectation of a second advent tells equally against all *supernaturalism*. They may themselves rest satisfied in believing the *supernaturalism* of the past, while rejecting everything of the kind which is supposed to be future, but they greatly deceive one another if they imagine that this distinction will be admitted by the sceptical. These men are certainly consistent in per-

ceiving that in this respect the past and the future must stand or fall together.

46. Good men may deny this, as they often do, by maintaining that the work of the Holy Spirit on the heart of man is supernatural, and that since this greatest of blessings is not withheld from public ministrations and kindred agencies, no other kind of supernaturalism is needed. But such speech, as every one knows, is mere evasion, since this is not what is meant by supernatural interposition. Sceptics who deny the supernatural element in the Bible do not ordinarily deny that God acts on the spirit of man ; neither do they who look for some fresh supernatural interposition confound what they expect with providential developments, however extraordinary, such as from time to time meet us either in the history of the past or in our own experience.

47. The rapid spread of Christianity, for instance, and its subjugation of the Roman empire, however striking, was no more supernatural, properly speaking, than the equally rapid spread of Mahomedanism in the countries it overran. The reformation effected by Luther and his coadjutors was not less the result of natural causes than the counter-reformation accomplished by the Jesuits, under the influence of which the Protestant movement was effectually checked, and the greater part of Europe restored to the Papacy. The rising up

of gifted preachers like Wesley and Whitefield, recalling attention to neglected truth, and resuscitating dormant spiritual energy, is not more wonderful than like spiritual results produced from time to time by Roman Catholic revivalists, whose labours have often transformed communities, and effected lasting good.

48. These things, because they belong to the spiritual order of the world, and not to the physical, should not be called supernatural. They are but the appointed workings of those ordinary laws under which the spiritual economy is administered, and should never be mixed up with direct and unusual interventions from above. We do not speak of the growth of corn as supernatural because it could not be produced without the sun and the rain that cometh from God. We do not regard an abundant harvest as any special proof of Divine interference, or a deficient one as indicating Divine displeasure. Why then should we regard the anxiety of a crowded and attentive audience to hear the words of a preacher, or even his success in 'winning souls,' as more or less than illustrations of that marvellous adaptation of means to ends which God has appointed in the spiritual world as much as in the physical, which in each case, *as a rule*, acts with the regularity of a law, but which nevertheless, whether we speak of the harvest of the earth, or the harvest of souls, is subject to

singular fluctuations, to seasons of drought, to failures from causes which we can neither anticipate nor understand. Yet the Church is no more under the absolute rule of spiritual law than the outer world is under the absolute sway of natural law. In each case God is *in* the law, or rather *is* the law, but in neither has He bound Himself to sustain such LAW for ever, or decided that all things shall continue as they have done from the foundation of the world. The supernatural and not the mechanical, the exception and not the rule, may therefore in each case be reasonably looked for in the last resort.

49. The history of Christianity—to say nothing of the preceding dispensation—furnishes us with instances of supernatural intervention, respecting which, if their occurrence be admitted, no such questions can be raised. To take only three examples:—The annunciation of the birth of a Saviour by the angels to the shepherds, the conversion of St. Paul, and the resurrection of Christ, are all events which, if allowed to have actually taken place, are supernatural in a very different sense from any action of the Holy Spirit on the heart of a believer, or indeed from anything that has occurred since the dispersion of the Jewish people. Each of these interventions was clearly supernatural, having no connection with any known

antecedent, and taking place in a manner altogether unusual, and at a time when least expected. Each, too, has its appropriate position in the Divine order, and each marks a crisis in the history of the world. *Such is the place of the supernatural.*

50. Now it is certainly remarkable—explain the thing as we may—that supernaturalism, properly so called, has never been seen or heard of in our world except among the Jews ; it ceased, even in its least striking manifestations, when that people rejected their Messiah and blasphemed the Holy Ghost ; and some think that Scripture justifies the expectation that it will be restored only in connection with the gathering of Israel as a people, when they will once more be dealt with in judgment and in mercy by their righteous King.

51. The language of the prophets in relation to that people—marvellously sustained, as it always has been, by their wonderful preservation—certainly indicates *a peculiarity* in their relationship to God as a nation which appears to be *permanent*. The elect Church, consisting both of Jews and Gentiles, of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as well as of the men in all ages of whom the world was not worthy, will have, according to Scripture, as kings and priests, *undisputed supremacy* in the future ; but that Israel, *regarded as a nation*, will, on the new earth, stand in a *peculiar* relation to God, and be distinct from any other people, seems probable

enough if the prophets are to be believed when they speak of her in terms like these,—‘Thy Maker is thy husband.’ ‘The Lord hath called thee a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit.’ ‘In a little wrath I hid My face from thee for a moment, but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee.’ The fifty-fourth chapter of Isaiah is full of such promises, so also is the sixty-second chapter,—‘Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken ; neither shall thy land any more be termed Desolate : but thou shalt be called Hephzi-bah, and thy land Beulah’ (meaning married). See also Jer. ii. 2 ; iii. 14 ; xxxi. 4. To expound all these passages as referring only to the Christian Church seems to be trifling with Scripture.

52. The long period that has elapsed since the cessation of the supernatural, a period already stretching through eighteen hundred years, appears, so far as Scripture is concerned, to be *parenthetical*,—one during which a Gentile election is gathered, but all supernatural manifestations withheld. No prophet or apostle, unless it be John in the Apocalypse, refers to this period ; no prediction beyond what may be comprised in occasional anticipations of a great falling away reveals to us its character ; no expectation is held out that the apostolic period would be followed by one distinguished by a great ingathering of souls. On the contrary, shadows, clouds, and darkness settle

over the scene, and indicate, however dimly, the long night which is destined to become the precursor of a glorious day.

53. What right, however, it will be said, have any of us to expect supernatural intervention *now*? The answer is, the expectation is grounded on the belief that a crisis, not dissimilar to those that have been referred to, is near at hand, and if so, it is but natural to look for a Divine inauguration of the new era.

54. Two such interpositions are distinctly spoken of by our Lord himself as yet to come—the ‘*sign* of the Son of man in heaven,’ and the *actual coming* of Christ in the clouds accompanied by the angels,—for these things are distinct: the *first*, perhaps, depicted in the Apocalypse by the breaking of the sixth seal (Rev. vi. 12—17), for these verses only describe *universal dismay* occasioned apparently by a *spectacle* (but nothing more) so terrible that men would hide themselves, if possible, from the sight; the *second*—referred to possibly in the nineteenth chapter, from the eleventh to the sixteenth verses,—where the Lord is spoken of as coming with the armies of heaven. The *time between* the appearing of the sign and the actual coming may not be long, but important events are to take place during that brief period, characterized chiefly by the rapid intensification both of

good and evil, and by events briefly indicated in the prophecy (Rev. xiii. 11—18 to xiv. 6, 7 ; and also vii. 1—17 and xi. 1—13).

55. The *fact* of our Lord's return, or rather, the ground of our belief in it, does not, of course, depend upon our possibly erroneous interpretation of certain passages in the Apocalypse. At least twenty texts might be quoted either from the gospels or epistles in which that return is asserted or implied either by Jesus himself or by His apostles, while *the time* of that return, although hidden from every eye, is shown to have a place in the predictions of the future,—that it is to stand, like everything else, *in an appointed order*.

56. Now it is to this event 'the isolated' look, as the most hopeful of all, and it is because they attach importance to its being continually kept in view, that, among other reasons, they feel bound to stand apart from a state of things which seems to rest either on its denial or on its supposed non-importance. They know how many there are who *love* the Lord, yet do not 'long for His appearing,' and they know too how such are but too often in the habit of saying, 'Where is the promise of His coming?' But they do not unchristianize these brethren on that account ; they are satisfied that this state of things cannot last, and in this belief they rest and wait.

57. Into the reasons which induce them to

believe that a crisis is near which *may* involve 'the sign' spoken of, it would not be wise to enter, since every one of them may be disputed. Let it suffice to say that, apart from any conclusions drawn from Scripture, some of the deepest thinkers tell us that "there are already on the globe traces of a demonstration that the human race is drawing to a close. Each of the great human families has had its day,—its infancy, its manhood, its decline. The last two races that have not been tried are, on the stage of earth, doing their work now. There is no other to succeed them. The time is near when the bones of the last human being will be given to the dust. It is certain that before very long the race must be extinct." (*Quoted from Robertson of Brighton.*)

Dr. Arnold, when lecturing in Oxford, after taking a survey of modern history, once asked whether there were, in the existing resources of the nations of mankind, any materials for a new epoch, distinct from those which have gone before? And he answered, *None*.

Dr. Stanley, meditating on this conclusion, which he does not dispute, observes, "We cannot hesitate to say that, if the Christian Church be drawing to its end, or if it continue to its end with no other objects than those which it has hitherto sought, it will end with its acknowledged resources confessedly undeveloped, its first hopes of usefulness

almost untried and unattempted. It will have been like an ungenial spring, cut short in full view of the summer,—a stately vessel wrecked within the very sight of shore." (*Lect. on the Eastern Church*, p. 79.)

The isolated would add,—The vessel is not wrecked; it but disappears for a season in the narrow straits of death, soon to emerge, in new splendour, on the ocean of unclouded felicity.

58. A life of waiting, however, implies a life of prayer and of consecration to God, for with spiritual apathy or indolence such a life can have no affinity. It is wrong, therefore, to say that the separated are out of sympathy with other Christians because they stand apart, or because they pray alone. Prayer indeed must, of necessity, in their case be chiefly solitary prayer, but it need not therefore be either selfish or unsympathetic. Jesus prayed *alone*, and so for the most part did His disciples.

59. The institution called the prayer meeting, honoured and important as it is considered in modern days, was as unknown to the apostolic church as it had always been to the pious Israelite. The calling of Christians together by public advertisement or otherwise to pray on a fixed day for some given blessing, would surely have seemed very strange to early converts; nor would they

perhaps have deemed it altogether a spiritual thing to appoint one or more to give utterance to their desires and opinions, on the supposition that others would mentally follow and assent to the petitions. This order of action would not, in all probability, have seemed *to them* either wise or Scriptural. To invite a body of persons to pray in common for some blessing supposed by those who have originated the conference to be specially needed, and to cherish the expectation that such united supplication would have power with God and prevail, they would, most likely, have considered to be *a mistake*.

60. And such it surely must be if prayer is regarded, as it always ought to be, as the *spontaneous* outpouring of the soul before God,—the irrepressible necessity of a spirit touched by its needs, sensible of its weakness, and thirsting for communion with God. The modern notion of *public* prayer seems to be that, in one aspect, it is a discourse *to God* intended to act upon human hearers *for their benefit*, and in another a power *brought to bear upon God*, the pressure and efficacy of which He has made to depend on the union of numbers. Hence it is that so many public prayers are sermons rather than supplications, while others are supposed to derive their main value from the union of multitudes in them, or rather from *the assent of multitudes to them*. “The more exten-

sively," says an eminent minister, "we can *organize an agreement* to ask for specific things in prayer, and the more symphonious these prayers are, the more assuredly will those things be done for us by the Father who is in heaven." Hence *money* is raised and *machinery* created to secure what are called 'concerts' in prayer. From all this 'the isolated' separate themselves. They believe that this mechanical view of supplication would never have prevailed had the place of the supernatural in Christianity been rightly considered.

61. Need it be insisted upon that, in everything spiritual, *reality and intensity* are of far more importance than anything else, and that, in seeking to do good to others, *calm trust* in the Divine wisdom is infinitely better than emotional excitement? It is quite possible even *to pray* as if we loved souls better than the Lord himself; how much more *to work* with an impatience which regards all means as sanctified which seem to promote that end. The supposition that any man best secures his own spiritual interests by incessant engagements in trying to do good to others is one of those mischievous errors which, based on the utter misapplication of a text, has done more to lower the piety and to stunt the growth of young converts than perhaps anything else.

62. The desire so often expressed for a revival of religion amongst us would indeed be a foretaste

of blessing if it did not frequently mean the increased prosperity of existing agencies, the entire accordance of which with the will of God is always tacitly assumed. A revival that would increase congregations, multiply church members, add to ministerial comfort, and produce larger contributions towards the accomplishment of our various schemes, would doubtless be welcomed everywhere. But one that should begin in self-distrust and in loss of complacency with ecclesiasticism or sectarianism ; which should manifest itself in the deepening of personal piety, in the growth of Christian individualism, in dissatisfaction with things as they are, in an unworldliness which at present Christians regard as uncalled for, in lives spent with Christ in heavenly places, and in the constant hope and expectation of that 'sign,' be it what it may, which shall make all men know that Christ is at hand,—a revival, I say, of this kind would be as distasteful to the churches as it would be odious to the world.

63. The isolated (whether on good grounds or otherwise is an open question) being satisfied that the time for the appearance of this 'sign of the Son of man' draws near, feel bound to set themselves, like Daniel, 'to understand in their hearts,' and 'to chasten themselves before God,' praying, *not for any particular form* of Divine interference, expressed or understood, but for that deepening of

their own and others' piety, which is the best preparation for whatever may be in the future. They feel they cannot do this effectually while habitually uniting in an order of worship which assumes that no material change is either to be expected or desired; which therefore subjects them to influences every way opposed to those they desire to come under; which pains and injures them by the constant presentation both in prayer and in preaching of much which they cannot accept; and which—so far as it acts upon them at all—paralyzes their hope and deadens their sensibility to what they believe to be most important. Therefore, regretting that faith in the mechanical should be, as a rule, so strong, and faith in the supernatural so weak, *they stand apart, and without unkindness bid farewell to the so-called religious world.*



"SCATTERED ONES."

"The New Testament seems to go on the assumption that *the few* must sacrifice themselves for the many. The sacrifice in question consists in witnessing sometimes for higher truths, and sometimes for a higher standard of conduct than is ever likely to characterize Christian society ; a witness that sometimes involves the voluntary resignation of earthly distinction, and it may be the positive embracing of poverty and scorn ; a willingness to be accounted foolish or mad if thereby Christ can be *truly* represented, His teaching be faithfully set forth, His example of humility, self-sacrifice, and disinterestedness be exhibited and illustrated.

The fact cannot escape notice that in every age certain persons have always been found who, wisely or unwisely, have endeavoured at all cost to live a higher, nobler, and more disinterested life than others. Saints of this class are always in the world. They are with us in the present day ; *in* the world, but *not of* it ; 'unknown, yet well known ; having nothing, and yet possessing all things !'

As a rule ordinary Christians stand aside from such people. They call them eccentric. They accuse them of staining a world which is too beautiful to be despised ; and, in short, of living as if Christianity were not both adapted and intended to promote enjoyment in the present state, but exclusively given to bear on one that is to come. They act thus, chiefly because they hold that the bright and glorious predictions of the Old Testament seers, so far as they remain unfulfilled, were intended to find their realization in an age like our own ; that the approach of this golden era is to be seen in the improvement of society, in the advance of science, in the *sanctification* of material progress, and in the gradual appearance of the promised kingdom of God. With this view of things it is impossible, except in a non-natural sense, to speak of Christians *now* as

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being 'pilgrims and strangers on the earth,' or as being called upon to crucify anything in the world which is not obviously unjust or unclean.

Yet in spite of the ridicule which is poured on such persons, in spite of prejudice, of false reasoning, and of gross perversions of Scripture, these men *influence* Christian society. They check, in a thousand unperceived ways, tendencies that are downward in their direction, and they keep up a standard which too many are constantly endeavouring to lower. Let this also be noted,—they do all this without thinking they are doing it, without assuming the slightest credit in the matter; without any combination; without the formation of any sect or party; without being, as a class, in any way distinguishable from others.

A careful examination of Scripture will show that the existence of such a body on the earth *in permanence* is anticipated by the inspired penmen; that it is predicted and provided for; that it is the only real succession to the apostolate, the only true church, the only gospel ministry; that it is always *assumed* in Scripture that these and these only will adhere to Christ's word *in the sense* that the first converts to the faith adhered to them. These are the Lord's preachers; quick to listen when He speaks, and faithful to report what they hear, according to their light and their opportunity.

Whatever else is in the world for the purpose of Christianizing society or extending the knowledge of divine truth is more or less of the world; is *necessarily*, to some extent, professional, and therefore bound up with such matters as status, income, and daily bread. Springing out of Christian society, and sustained by it, it is impossible, from the very nature of things, that *as a whole* such a ministry should ever rise to a much higher elevation than its origin. It is, of course, not suffered to fall below that standard."

'*Sunday Morning*,' August, 1871.





the 1990s, the number of people with a mental health problem has increased by 50% (Mental Health Foundation 1999). The prevalence of mental health problems in the UK is estimated to be 10% (Mental Health Foundation 1999).

There is a growing awareness of the need to address the needs of people with mental health problems. The Department of Health (1999) has published a strategy for mental health care, which aims to improve the lives of people with mental health problems and to reduce the burden of mental health problems on society.

The strategy is based on the following principles: (1) people with mental health problems should be treated as individuals; (2) people with mental health problems should be given the opportunity to participate in decisions about their care; (3) people with mental health problems should be given the opportunity to live in the community; (4) people with mental health problems should be given the opportunity to work and to study; (5) people with mental health problems should be given the opportunity to live a full and active life.

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